

CONCERNING THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD

NO. 3154

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 22, 1909
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 20, 1873

*“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering;
not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”*
Romans 2:4

[Other sermons by Mr. Spurgeon upon the same verse, are as follows: Sermons #1714, Earnest Expostulation and #2857, God's Goodness Leading to Repentance]

IT is a great sign of love on God's part that He condescends to reason with men. When they had offended against Him, He might have said to them, “I will punish you for your offenses,” and He might have gone His way until the day for carrying out His threat arrived. But instead of doing so, He is unwilling that any should perish. According to His own declaration, He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that he should turn unto Him and live. And therefore He pauses and expostulates.

When a man has been greatly offended by another and is very angry with him, he does not usually stay to reason with his opponent—his anger is too hot for that. But if he is of a meek and gentle spirit, and anxious that the quarrel should be ended, he begins to reason with the other man and says to him, “Why did you act so unkindly towards me? Why did you treat me thus? You have acted most unjustly—have you no sense of right? I have not deserved this at your hands—why then did you thus deal with me? Come now, do you utterly hate or despise me, or why do you thus continue to annoy and provoke me?” In such a fashion as this, but with infinite tenderness, the Lord reasons with sinners.

So, dear friend, if you are still unconverted, regard it as a clear proof of God's lovingkindness toward you that He again sends to you the word of expostulation. Take it for granted that he desires your good and wishes you well, otherwise He would not have bidden His servant say to you, “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

From the connection of our text, it would appear that there were some, in Paul's day, as there are in ours, who, seeing the great wickedness of mankind, and observing that God did not at once destroy the ungodly, gathered from that fact that they, themselves might sin with impunity. Seeing that God did not launch His thunderbolts at even very gross sinners—and strike them with immediate and total destruction by pestilence, famine, or sword—these people wickedly said, “What does it matter what sins or crimes we commit? Evidently God is asleep, or winks at such deeds as these, or perhaps there is no God at all. Anyhow, let us live in sin and take pleasure therein, for there will be no evil consequences to us if we do so. We may eat the fat, drink the sweet, and enjoy ourselves to our hearts' content, and there will be no one to call us to account.”

So that, from the very fact that God was merciful and gracious, they inferred that they might be sinful and rebellious. And because God's foot was slow to come in vengeance, they imagined that God's hand would not be heavy when He did come, and they said, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!”

It was to a sinner of this sort that Paul put the question, “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” I am going to put that question to you who are here—and I pray that the Holy Spirit may put it to the conscience of every unconverted man and woman.

I. Now first LET US HONOR THE GOODNESS, FORBEARANCE, AND LONGSUFFERING OF GOD.

The description given by the apostle is threefold. “The riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.” I shall probably not be wrong in saying that God’s “goodness” may refer to the way in which He has overlooked all our past sins, so that He has not yet dealt with us in justice concerning them. That His forbearance may refer to our present sins, the transgressions of this day and hour, and that His longsuffering may refer to our future sins, for He knows that we shall continue to sin, yet He does not destroy us, but bears with us still.

What a heavy weight is upon my mind and heart as I think of the forbearance of God towards the impenitent with regard to their past sins! Why, there are some of you who have committed sins that you would be ashamed to have mentioned—sins against light and knowledge too, which you knew to be sins, not merely one or two, but very many. It would have been the easiest possible thing in the world for God to have destroyed you, yet He has not done so.

How long can you keep your temper when you are provoked? Five minutes? Half an hour? “That is a long time,” say you. Suppose you were insulted to your face, how long would you hold your peace and bear it? An hour? I fear there are not many of you who would do that, but that you would soon give an answer to the man who had dared thus to challenge you.

What, then, shall I say of God, who has borne with some here thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, perhaps eighty years, in which the mere fact of their living has been an insult to Him, for they have lived in opposition to His will and His law, and have often defied Him to His face, and in their provoking blasphemy, have even invited Him to damn their bodies and souls.

Oh, the amazing mercy of a God who can bear with a sinner for twelve months, who can even bear with him for fifty times twelve months and can still stand—and in tones of pity and entreaty say, “Come now, come even *now*, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Then, next, it is no small mercy that God bears with your present sins, so despise not the riches of His forbearance to you now. Most of you have long been hearers of the Gospel. You are sitting in the place where you have sat and heard the Gospel preached hundreds of times—and the very pew you are sitting in might witness against you that, although you have so long heard it, you have refused to obey it.

You have promised better things, but you have never performed them. You have lied, not to men, but unto God. You have lulled your conscience to sleep when God has spoken to you through it and you have even quenched His Holy Spirit when He has striven with you—yet up to this moment, God who, without uttering a word, could send your guilty soul to hell, forbears to do so.

He cries, “How can I give thee up?” He looks the rebel in the face and says to him, “How can I damn you? How can I cast you into hell? my compassions are moved towards you. My repentings are kindled together.” It is indeed great grace for God to do this—and He is doing it now. Every moment that an unconverted man is out of hell, God is manifesting towards him the riches of His forbearance, and it is no small strain upon divine mercy when men continue to sin notwithstanding this forbearance.

The Roman lictors used to carry on their shoulders the rods with which prisoners were condemned to be beaten—and in the center of the rods was the axe for the final punishment of death. Those rods were bound with cords having many knots, and the lictors would untie the knots slowly while the judge waited to see if the prisoner would say something that would prevent him from being beaten—but when the last knot was untied, they bared his back to scourge him. The judge still looked at him to see if there was any sign of repentance—and if there was not any, then came the axe.

So, with regard to some of you, God has been undoing the knots one by one—ay, and He has beaten you with more than one of His rods—you have suffered from sickness, and poverty, and many other

tribulations. God's rods are smiting you now, but He is slow to take up the axe. He is stern in His judgment upon the impenitent, but He is very pitiful and compassionate—and unwilling to deal the death-blow if it can be prevented. "Turn ye," says He, "turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" and with all the eloquence of words, He cries to men that they would turn unto Him and live.

Then there is the longsuffering of God with regard to sins that are yet to be committed. O sinner, you cannot promise that you will not sin in the future! You may foolishly say, "I will not," but the Ethiopian might sooner change his skin and the leopard his spots as that you, who are accustomed to do evil, might begin in your own strength to do well.

The fountain of your heart is foul—so polluted streams must continue to flow from it. You are born of such a race and you have so added to your natural depravity by your constant sinfulness that you will still go on to sin until grace changes and renews you. How is it that God, who knows this, does not strike you out of existence? Is He going to spare you for another year still to set your hard heart against His love? Sinner, does God mean to spare you for another seven years' fornication and lust? Will He permit you to live another ten years to still be a thief? Shall you have another twenty years in which every Sabbath shall be spent in sin, and in which almost every night shall see you reeling as a drunkard through the streets?

Oh, if God knows that you will sin like this, how is it that He bears with you? If the destroying angel is told what you will be, he will stand with his sword drawn, or with his hand upon its hilt, and say, "Commission me, dread Sovereign, to cleanse the earth of those who blaspheme Your name, and break Your law, and it shall be done!" But God says, "Put up your sword into its sheath and wait a little longer! They shall have another appeal, another invitation, and another entreaty." Oh, that these might be of avail to them and that they might turn unto God, and live!

Beside this threefold appeal in the text, *God's goodness is manifested in great abundance*. "Despisest thou *the riches of his goodness* and forbearance and longsuffering?" Truly God's mercy to us has been like a mine of riches. What has God not done for some of us? If I were not, at this moment, a believer, I should be of all here present one of the most ungrateful. I will state my own case knowing it to be similar to that of many others who are present.

Cradled in the home of piety, nurtured with the tenderest care, taught the Gospel from my youth up, with the holiest example of my parents, the best possible checks all around to prevent me running into sin—yet, notwithstanding all that, sinning and revolting more and more, but checked by conscience, as when a steed tries to leap forth, but its rider reins it in—yet still resolved to sin—determined to go further and yet further into it, and even being angry with God for checking sin.

Trying to get the bit between one's teeth, and to run away from God, and sin worse than before. Then struck down by the hand of God in sickness, alarmed, terrified, resolving to live differently—but being raised up to health again, shaking off serious impressions with a laugh, and going back to the follies of sin again. Then once more rebuked, made to tremble, thunderstruck, and awed before God—hearing of the precious Savior, yet putting Him off, and saying that another day would be soon enough to be a Christian. That is my sad story until sovereign grace met with me, and that is also the story of many others present here.

Yet all the while, God has kept you supplied with the blessings of providence so that you have never suffered want. He has preserved you from the dangers and trials and troubles which a great many others have had to endure. He has placed you where an earnest Gospel ministry never lets you rest in your sin. He has put you where faithful friends importune you with tears to care about your immortal soul. He has raised you up from sickness, perhaps preserved you in the day of battle, delivering you when many others died all around you.

Has God done all this for you and are there in your mind no tender thoughts toward Him, no grateful memories of His great mercy? Oh think of where you might have been long ago! Might they not have

said over your dead body, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust?” Ay, long ago there might have been a portion for you in that dread place where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched.

Think of the gracious promises that are still proclaimed in your hearing, that, if you return unto the Lord, He will have mercy upon you and will forgive you all your trespasses. Think of the Christ of God who died for sinners on the cross. Think of the Spirit of God who has come down to earth to strive and plead with sinners. Think of the Father’s almighty love, which is bestowed upon all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, His Son.

Oh, there have indeed been riches of mercy, riches of goodness, riches of forbearance, riches of longsuffering, and man, do you despise all this? Woman, away yonder, do *you* despise all this? All this mercy has passed before you in one long panorama for many years—what do you say about it? Do you not say, “My God, forgive me that I have so long slighted You?” Or will you still despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?

I might, if I had time, try to measure the longsuffering of God. And if I did, I should need four lines. *The excellence of God’s goodness is manifested by four considerations.* First consider the Divine Person who manifests it. Remember who *God* is. Think how great He is. No one likes to be insulted by his inferiors, then how can God bear to be insulted by the creatures whom He has made, the creatures who owe Him their very breath? How can God endure to be opposed and defied by one so utterly insignificant and unworthy as man is? Yet He does not crush His rebellious creatures as He well might.

Think next of His omniscience. We sometimes bear with people because we forget much of what they have said or done, but what would it be to have before your mind’s eye all the evil speaking of twenty years ago, and all the hard sayings and unkind acts of a long life of enmity against you? Yet, though God has all our sins ever before Him, and our most secret sins in the light of His countenance, He does still forbear to smite and destroy us.

Think, too, how powerful He is—none can escape from Him when He pursues them. Moses could run away from Pharaoh and hide in the land of Midian, but where could we flee to escape from the vengeance of God if He had resolved at once to punish all those who had rebelled against Him? How could we have stood up against Him? Where are the bars of brass that could resist the omnipotence of the besieging God? None of His creatures can stand against Him anymore than the stubble can stand against the flame, or the tow against the fire. And yet He has such forbearance that He has put up with us all these years. O blessed God, I love You for Your wondrous patience to me and to my fellow sinners that You do still spare us though we have so sorely provoked You!

Then take another measuring line and consider the being to whom God’s goodness is manifested—that is, *man*. Think of what man is and then ask yourself if such a little insignificant creature dares to proclaim war against God. Has he the audacity to defy God and to say, “I will not do what You have bidden me do?” Why, the ant that crosses your path, on a summer evening, is not half as insignificant in comparison with you as you are when compared with the Almighty God.

And it is man who has received so much from God—man, who could not live an instant without God’s permission and support—who stands up and says that he will not be God’s servant and that he will not accept the Savior whom God has appointed! O you heavens, how is it that you do not fall and crush the miscreant? Great God, it is only because You are God that You do put up with sinful men so long!

Another measuring line is this—consider the conduct to which God’s goodness is a reply. In other words, consider what *sin* is. There is not a person here who has ever seen sin as it really is in God’s sight. In the least sin there is more evil than there is even in hell, for hell is at least the vindication of divine justice, but sin defies that justice. Sin is an unlimited and unmitigated evil. There are sins that are so wanton, so aggravating, so willful, and men go so much out of their way to commit them—there are sins that are repeated so often, even in spite of chastisement—there are some sins that are so polluting, so defiling, in which a man degrades and ruins others as well as himself, and there are some sins so infamous that it is marvelous that God still bears with the men who commit them, and that, while He

holds back the thunderbolts of justice, He holds out the silver sceptre of mercy, and says even to the chief of sinners, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

Then if we wanted one other measuring line, it should be the consideration of the boons which God’s goodness brings. Our common mercies—daily bread, raiment to put on, health for necessary labor, rescue from peril, preservation from death, the institution of the Sabbath, the gift of the Bible, the Gospel of salvation—these are immeasurable boons. Who, then, can calculate the riches of the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God?

I cannot help feeling ashamed of myself while I am talking to you upon this theme, for I have a case to plead for God that I think I ought to plead much better than I do. And if I knew how to do it, I would do it, my gracious, blessed God. Alas! Alas! there are some of you who treat God so ill, yet He has never done you any harm and He is always doing you good. If His service were slavery, I would not wonder if you did not serve Him. If to be His children were to be tortured and made unhappy, I could not so much blame you.

But as His service is perfect freedom, as His love is ineffable bliss, as His presence is heaven begun below, why do you flee from that which is for your own highest happiness, and run away from that which is all of God’s mercy to you? O sin, you have made men insane. You have given them over to a madness which makes them see no beauty in God, no charms in the person of the Redeemer, and no attraction in the salvation which He has bought with His own most precious blood! O divine Spirit, I cannot plead as I would—come Thou, and make men value as they ought the riches of the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God!

II. Now let me briefly try to show you HOW MEN MAY DESPISE THE GOODNESS, FORBEARANCE, AND LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

First, many persons do it *by never considering that they do receive goodness from God*. They take all that God gives them as a matter of course and never think about it. If you have been very generous to some poor man and have relieved his wants for several years, I think you must sometimes feel grieved if you find that he takes it quite as a matter of course and never shows any gratitude to you, but expects you to still do just as you have so long done. You think to yourself “I am not bound to help him, it is entirely an act of favor on my part.” You do not like to say, “I will not give him any more,” but you are strongly tempted to say so.

Now if you have been ungrateful to your God for all his goodness to you, I pray you not to continue so. The swine walk under the oak and eat up the acorns that fall from it, but never grunt out their thanks for them—will you be such swine as that? Oh, be not so! Rather imitate the little chicken, which drinks out of the stream, and then raises its head as if to thank God. I know that there are many here who would not like to be considered ungrateful, neither are they so to their fellow men. I know you would scorn such a character, yet you are ungrateful to your best Friend, who has done far more for you than all the rest of your friends put together. Do not despise his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering by allowing it to remain unnoticed.

Some despise the longsuffering of God *by opposing His design in it*. The design of God’s goodness is to make bad men into good men. The design of God’s mercy to impenitent sinners is to make them penitent. You say to God, “I will not have You for my God” and He replies, “I will prolong your life. I will prosper you in business. I will multiply my favors to you.” Yet you still say, “But I am not going to be moved by all this.”

God comes to your bedside when you are lying there very ill—the cold sweat of death is standing on your brow, and He draws the fever from your system and again prolongs your life—and gives you another ten years here, yet you say to Him, “I love You none the better even after doing all this for me.” Is that right? God has been gently leading you, not driving you, but drawing you towards Himself out of love towards you—so do not despise His lovingkindness by pulling the other way.

There are some who do even worse than this, for *they pervert the longsuffering and forbearance of God into a reason for being unbelieving*. They say to themselves “We have got on very well in this

world although we have never been religious. We have had a good time of it though we have never prayed. We have been raised up from sickness, though afterwards we never thought about religion anymore, so we may do as we like. God will not be angry with us, He will not stretch out His hand and smite us.”

Ah! I know nothing that is more perilous to an ungodly man than to go on prospering. But whenever I meet with an ungodly man who is in great trouble, I have a hope that God has chosen that man unto eternal life and that therefore He will not let him go to hell, but puts bars and posts across the road to block the way to perdition. But as for the man who is prosperous though ungodly, in regard to whom every wind seems to be favorable to his ships, and every season gives him better crops than his neighbors have—and whose children are multiplied, and so on—do you know why God acts thus towards him? I can tell you.

I have heard of a Christian woman, who had a very wicked husband. He was a dreadful swearer and always opposed her in every good thing, yet she was the kindest wife that a man ever had. One night, or rather, early in the morning, as he sat drinking with his companions, he told them that he had a splendid wife, and that, if they were all to go home with him, even though it was two o’clock in the morning, if she had gone to bed, she would get up and prepare supper for them without showing the slightest sign of displeasure, but would, for his sake, wait upon them as if they were lords in the land.

They went to the house and the husband called for his wife, as she *had* gone to bed. She put on her clothes, and came down, and got ready such things as she had—and made them all welcome. They asked her why she was so kind to one who was so brutal to her, but she would not answer. Another day she said to her husband, when he asked a similar question, “I have prayed for you thousands of times and I have done all I can to bring you to the Savior. Yet there is a dreadful fear in my mind that you will be lost. I am afraid you will continue to sin against God and that you will be sent to hell, so I have made up my mind that I will make you as happy as you can be while you are here, for I fear that you will never have any happiness hereafter.”

And I believe it is for the same reason that God lets wicked men get rich. “There,” says the Lord, “they shall enjoy themselves while they can. I will give them these things while they are here, for the time will come when I can show them no pity, but my inexorable justice must drive them from all pleasure forever.”

I think if there had been any true manhood in that man whom I have mentioned, he would have said to his wife, “Woman, do you feel like that towards me? Have you loved me so much and prayed for me so long, and have you put up with any inconvenience so that you may do me good? Then, at any rate, I will be unkind to you no longer and I will hear what these things are that you say will make for my peace.” A sane man would talk like that—and if you are sane, I pray you now to heed what your God says to you.

This is how He put the case long ago and He might put it to you in the same way, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the donkey his master’s crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”

Which of you would keep an ox or a donkey if it never served you in any way? Which of you would suffer even a dog to be in your house if it always flew at you when you came near it? Yet God has put up with you, His ungrateful creatures, for these many years. Will you never kiss the hand that feeds you? Are you more asinine than a donkey? Are you more of a beast than the ox itself is? Oh, may God deliver sinners from continuing such injustice to Him and such cruelty to themselves!

III. Now, lastly, LET US FEEL THE FORCE OF THE LEADING OF GOD’S GOODNESS, “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

It ought to be reason enough for our not despising God’s goodness that *it is a very unjust thing to despise it*. I looked in classic history to see if I could find any parallel case to this between man and God—and I found one something like it.

In Alexander's day, a soldier who had been shipwrecked, was hospitably received by a certain person, who took him to his house, and fed and clothed him. But as soon as the soldier was able to get back to Alexander, he misrepresented the case with many falsehoods, and asked the great commander to give him the house of the man who had entertained him. When Alexander afterwards found out the ingratitude of the wretch who thus tried to deprive his host of his own house in order to get it for himself, he ordered him to be branded on the forehead so that he might be known everywhere as the ungrateful guest. But what branding iron and what coals of juniper shall ever be hot enough to brand the ungrateful being who was created by God, fed by God, put in the way of mercy, invited by grace—and yet remained ungrateful still?

Seldom is man so ungenerous to his fellow man as man is to his God. The very men who would scorn to rob their fellow men of a farthing, go on robbing God without compunction all their lives. Men who are scrupulously just in their dealings with their fellow merchants will persist in injustice to the God who created them. Why is this base conduct? Oh, I pray you, continue it not. I would, with tears in my eyes, entreat you to continue it no longer.

Are you not under great obligation to God? You know that He made you. Deep down in your soul there is a voice that says to you, "It is God who keeps you alive." You know that it is so. Then how can you imagine that the Creator and Preserver of all can be forgotten with impunity? Let me give you a text that will remind you how dangerous a thing it is to live in the neglect of God's goodness, "The wicked shall be turned into hell," (especially notice the next words), "and all the nations that *forget* God."

When I began to quote that text, you may have said to yourself "I am not wicked. I do not do anything outrageous." But listen again to the rest of the verse, "and all the nations that *forget*"—not the nations that swear, or blaspheme, or rebel against God—but "all the nations that *forget* God." "That is only one text," say you. Ah! but here is another and there are many like it, "How shall we escape if we"—what? "If we *neglect*"—that is all—it is only a matter of neglect, "if we *neglect* so great a salvation?"

Despising God by neglecting Him—despising Him by forgetting Him—this is a grievous kind of despising that will bring eternal ruin.

*"Lord, do Thou the sinner turn!
Rouse him from his senseless state;
Let him not Thy counsel spurn,
Rue his fatal choice too late!"*

It may seem to some of you, child's play to face this congregation, and to speak as I am now doing. But the Lord knows it is no child's play to me. I feel that I am accountable to God for all of you who, within a short time, will have to stand before my Master's judgment seat. And if at the last tremendous day, I were summoned to give an account of how I employed this opportunity of speaking to you, and if I should have to confess that I did not tell you plainly that the neglect of God would ruin you forever, if I should have to confess that I was cold and indifferent—as cold and indifferent as you now are—then *my* soul would be crimsoned with *your* soul's blood.

But it cannot be, it shall not be so, for I do entreat you, by the living God and by the Christ who died to save sinners—by the certainty of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the splendors of heaven and by the terrors of hell—I do beseech you to consider the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God.

Turn ye unto Him with weeping and with supplication, and above all, turn to the Gospel as it is here declared, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Or to put it in Christ's own full way, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

The Lord bring you all to simple faith in Jesus Christ His Son, then to obedience to Christ in the matter of baptism—and then may He preserve you by His grace until life's latest hour, never again to

despise, but forever to adore the goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering of God, for His dear name's sake!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ROMANS 4 AND 5:1-2

Romans 4:1. *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?*

What blessings did really come to Abraham, the father of the faithful? What is the nature of that covenant of grace which God made with him?

2. *For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.* Certainly, before God, Abraham neither gloried nor yet was justified by his works.

3. *For what saith the scripture?*

That is the question for us always to ask, "What saith the scripture?"

3. *Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

There is no doubt about that point, for in Genesis 15:6 we read, "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

4. *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*

He gets what he earns, what he deserves to have. What he receives is "not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

5-8. *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

So then it seems that the blessings of salvation come to men through faith and not through their own efforts—not as the reward of merit, but as the simple gift of God's grace.

9. *Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?*

Is this blessing entailed upon the natural seed of Abraham alone, or is it for others besides the Jews?

9-10. *For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.*

If you turn again to Genesis 15:6 and then to 17:10, you will find that Abraham was justified by faith before the rite of circumcision was instituted. The blessing came to him "not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision."

11-12. *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.*

The vital question is not, "How were we born?" or "What rites and ceremonies have been practiced upon us?" but "Do we believe in God? Have we true faith in God's Word? Are we trusting our souls to the keeping of God's Son?"

13. *For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

The law was promulgated on mount Sinai four hundred years after the covenant of grace was made with Abraham, the father of believers, and so made with all believers, for they are his true seed, and God has entered into a covenant of grace and salvation with them.

14-15. *For if they which are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.*

So that the law is not for justification, but for condemnation. It is the law that reveals sin and that shows sin to be sin—so men can never become right with God by the law.

16. *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace,* [See sermons #1347, How is Salvation Received? and #2159, The Holdfasts of Faith] *to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed;*

That is, to all believers, who are the true seed of Abraham. He is the father of the faithful and if you are one of the faithful, he is your father. And the covenant which God made with Abraham and his seed was made with you, and on your account, if you are indeed a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

16-22. *Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: he staggered not* [See sermons #733, Unstaggering Faith and #1367, Strong Faith] *at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*

O soul, if you are like one who is dead, if you are devoid of all strength, and grace, and savor—if you can but believe in God who can quicken the dead, if you will but trust your soul in the hands of Him who is able even to raise dry bones out of their graves, and make them live—your faith shall be imputed unto you for righteousness! Your faith is that which shall justify you in the sight of God, and you shall be “accepted in the beloved.”

Oh, what marvels faith works! This is the root-grace—all manner of good things spring from faith—but there must be faith as the root if there are to be other graces as the fruit. Do your God the honor to believe Him—to believe that He cannot lie—to believe that He has never promised what He is not able to perform. If you will do that, it is clear that you are one of Abraham’s seed, and the covenant made with Abraham was made with you also.

23-25. *Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.* [See sermon #2357, The Two Pillars of Salvation]

See the great object of saving faith? Christ, once dead, has been raised from the dead—and if you would be saved—you must rely upon the crucified and risen Savior. If you thus believe that Jesus the crucified is the Christ of God, the anointed Messiah and Redeemer, you prove that you are born of God. And if you trust yourself to the risen and glorified Christ, you have risen in Him and you shall rise to be with Him forever and ever.

Romans 5:1. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* [See Sermon #1456, Peace—A Fact and A Feeling]

My friend, are these words true concerning you? Can you put your finger on this verse and say, “This is true of me, ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have—I have—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’”? We who have believed in Jesus enjoy that peace—a deep, profound calm is upon our spirit whenever we think of God. We are not afraid of Him, We are not afraid to meet Him even on His judgment seat. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” Have you peace with God? Are you sure that you have it? If not, perhaps you are not justified by faith, for that is the root of it. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. *By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

This is a golden staircase—justification brings peace, and peace brings access into this grace wherein we are established. And then comes the joy of hope—and that hope fixes its eye on nothing less

than the glory of God. Grace is the stepping-stone to glory—and they who are justified by faith shall in due time be glorified by love.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.